

# Facets

*for women*

FEBRUARY 2007

## Celebrating friendship

**Women who run  
together find  
endurance  
in numbers**

**"We need female  
friends": Women  
share their stories**

**Money: Don't let it  
cause conflict in  
your relationships**

**Tell your kids you  
appreciate them,  
from A to Z**





# Aesthetics Give Yourself Something to Comfort

## Just how Important is your Smile?

**"In 2004, a scientific  
poll of American adults  
found...\***

**99.7%** of the respondents  
believe a smile is an important  
social asset

**96%** of adults said they  
believe an attractive smile makes  
a person more appealing to  
members of the opposite sex

**74%** felt that an unattractive  
smile could hurt a person's  
chances for career success"

\*("Inside Dentistry" May 2006).

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## notes from the newsroom

By HEIDI MARTTILA-LOSURE



**A**h, it's that time when love is in the air — or at least in the advertisements. And depending on the state of your relationships, your reaction to this season of floating pheromones can vary: You may be looking forward to the big V-Day with anticipation of what your sweetie

has cooked up, or you may be planning to hunker down at home with a tub of rocky road and try to ignore the whole thing.

But in addition to Valentine's Day in this month's middle, the whole month is dedicated to friendships, in the form of International Friendship Month. To celebrate that cause, this issue of Facets is focused on relationships, both romantic and otherwise.

First, on the power of female friendships: A group of local women share their views with freelance writer Susan Canny Vernon on what their women friends mean to them, and they also give ideas for making and supporting such friendships. If there are any introverts out there looking for strategies for meeting new people, be sure to take in their suggestions.

Nancy Lewis takes up the topic of female friendships as well in her column, writing about a friendship that has lasted 60 years, and Debra Atkinson introduces us to a group of women who laugh, learn and commiserate as they run together.

Laurie Winslow Sargent gives a word — actually, a whole list of words — on appreciating your children.

On the romantic side of things, Karen Petersen gives some advice on dealing with money conflicts, the most common source of discord in a relationship. And Marisa Myhre gives her second-annual picks of books for those looking for love or looking to make their love better.

And if nothing else seems to satisfy, check out Jolene Philo's recipe for Goopy Almond Cake, which is made for sharing. (Don't worry, you can double the recipe to make sure you get a piece.)

Happy Valentine's Day!

— Heidi Marttila-Losure, editor

### P.S. Facets is looking for unconventional women!

If you are a woman working in a field where women are few and far between, Facets would love to hear about your experiences. We're compiling an article about women who are breaking gender barriers today. If you're such a woman, or if you know of someone who fits the bill, please send me a note:

[hlosure@amestrib.com](mailto:hlosure@amestrib.com). Please respond by Friday, Feb. 2.



## Relationships

# WELCOME TO Facets

Facet > 1. One of the flat surfaces cut on a gemstone.  
2. The particular angle from which something is considered.

FACETS IS A SUPPLEMENT TO THE TRIBUNE

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#### COVER PHOTO

Snow adds pleasure to the  
workout as Sarah Mixdorf and  
Kelly Binkowski run along the  
trails of McCarthy Lee Park.

Photo by Small Dog  
Productions

#### Next issue:

Forward-thinking  
women

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### CORRECTION

A Web site in the January  
issue of Facets was incorrect.  
Professional organizer Mary  
Sigmann's Web site is  
[www.organizer-coach.com](http://www.organizer-coach.com).



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# FACETS calendar

If you have an event that would be of interest to Facets readers, please send it to [hlosure@amestrib.com](mailto:hlosure@amestrib.com) with "Facets Calendar" in the subject line.

DO YOU HAVE A PHOTO of women getting together? Send it to [hlosure@amestrib.com](mailto:hlosure@amestrib.com) and you might see your face here!

**Saturday, Jan. 27** — Barn Dance, 8 to 11 p.m., at the Collegiate Wesley Annex, 130 S. Sheldon Ave., featuring music by the Porch Stompers and calling by Lonna Nachtigal. Admission is \$5, or \$3 for students. No partner or previous experience needed.

**Friday, Feb. 9** — Valentine's Dinner at Reiman Gardens, 6 p.m. Treat your special someone to an elegant dinner in a romantic garden setting. Pre-payment required. Menu includes appetizer, salad, entrée (Beef Wellington) and dessert. The cost is \$75 per person. For more information, go to [www.reimangardens.com](http://www.reimangardens.com).

**Tuesday, Feb. 13** — "Cool Marketing Ideas" event by Snap! Creative Works, 11:45 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Loft, 408 Kellogg Ave., hosted by Kori Heuss and Ginger Johnson. See some fabulous, quirky, effective, outrageous examples of cool marketing ideas. The event will be informal and fun — open to anyone who wants a fun lunchtime show and tell. Bring your own lunch. For more information, call 450-7757.

**Thursday, Feb. 15** — "First Impressions" event by Snap! Creative Works, 11:45 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Loft, 408 Kellogg Ave., hosted by Cynthia Quant. Making a first impression, personally or professionally, is a one-shot deal! Learn how to make it count and what

you can do. Women and men are encouraged to come. Bring your own lunch. For more information, call 450-7757.

**Tuesday, Feb. 20** — "House Talk" event by Snap! Creative Works, 11:45 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Loft, 408 Kellogg Ave., hosted by Brenda Cloyd. Do you have questions about the house buying process? We will cover a whole range of things to think about before, during and after. Bring your own lunch. For more information, call 450-7757.

**Saturday, Feb. 24** — "Brunnier Bash: A Masquerade Ball," 7 p.m. at the Brunnier Art Museum. Pull out those masquerade masks, put on your dancing shoes, and join us for a night of intrigue in the most elegant of settings. Single tickets are \$5, couples are \$8, and tickets sold at the door are \$8/person. For more information, go to [www.museums.iastate.edu](http://www.museums.iastate.edu) or call 294-4442.

**Tuesday, Feb. 27** — "Communicate Effectively: Focus on E-mail" event by Snap! Creative Works, 11:45 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Loft, 408 Kellogg Ave., hosted by Tammy Stegman. Research shows that most successful people are effective communicators. E-mail is a high-value tool; learn how to use it effectively and efficiently. Bring your own lunch. For more information, call 450-7757.



Photos by DAVE GIESEKE

A calendar featuring a dozen Iowa State University women titled "Women Impacting ISU" is now available.

Twelve women were selected by a committee of students and faculty from among nominations made by members of the campus community for the 18x24-inch poster. The poster includes photographs of students and faculty/staff members who have achieved excellence in athletics, education, science and various other campus and community activities.

Faculty and staff selected are Susan Carlson, interim provost; Diane Debinski, associate professor of ecology, evolution and organismal biology; Tahira Hira, executive assistant to the president; Pat Miller, director of lectures; Penny Rice, women's center coordinator; and Calli Sanders, senior associate athletic director. Students on the calendar are Andrea Benzschawel, Julie Hunt, Lyndsey Medders, Sulianet Ortiz, Rohini Ramnath and Cilia Ruiz-Paz.

The calendar project was coordinated by Jenna Jones and Marisa Stadlman, members of Catt Associates, a student organization affiliated with the Catt Center for Women and Politics.

The 2,500 calendars will be distributed free of charge to anyone interested by contacting Jones at [jennaj@iastate.edu](mailto:jennaj@iastate.edu), or by contacting the Catt Center at either 294-3181 or [cattcntr@iastate.edu](mailto:cattcntr@iastate.edu).



IMAGES BY NGAIRE/233-5447

Ginger Johnson, owner of Snap! Creative Works, hosts one of a series of Connecting events in January. These events create an opportunity to meet and start relationships in a fun and effective manner — to enhance their lives, both professionally and personally. More events are planned; call Johnson at 450-7757 to learn how you can attend.





# Touch points

Take a moment to appreciate the way your skin connects you to others

By DR. KATHY L.P. COOK

- We experience touch before we are born, and it is important our entire lives. The power of touch is shown to be as important as eating and sleeping in infants. According to the Scholastic Early Childhood Today, infants who are rarely touched have brains 20 percent smaller than those who are touched a lot. There is evidence that touching helps development sleep patterns and strengthen the immune system.
- While the other senses that help us experience the world — sight, hearing, smell and taste — are all located in distinct areas, touch receptors are found all over the body. Receptors for touch are found in the dermis, the second layer of the skin.
- Different areas of the body are more sensitive due to increased number of touch receptors. The most sensitive areas of the body are the hands, lips, face, neck and tongue. There are 100 touch receptors in your fingertips and 5 million touch receptors overall.
- So what does this have to do with romance? Everything! Without touch, one of our basic abilities to interact with our partners would be lost. Just one more way our remarkable and complex skin is important in everything we do.



Dr. Kathy L.P. Cook is a board-certified dermatologist at Skin Solutions Dermatology, 500 Main St., in Ames. She can be reached at 232-3006.

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[ FITNESS ]

# STRENGTH (and endurance) in numbers

By DEBRA ATKINSON

You're exercising and an hour passes without you realizing it. Suddenly what was five becomes eight, then 10 miles.

So is true of women who run with other women.

It's deeper than physical support. Or even accountability and encouragement, though those are parts. It's a level of intimacy that isn't often reached with other acquaintances as quickly, if at all.

By mile 10, you know each other well.

"By mile 15, you can talk about guys, sex, pregnancy" — nothing is off limits, one running partner put it to Kelly Binkowski.

Binkowski, who has been a runner for 10 years, has run in a group since the beginning. Though she runs solo between, she's still running with other women. For her, it's multi-tasking. The physical stress relief coupled with a social component is a win-win. For sure, many women would agree that between work or school and home, they get lost.

Running helps them find

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A little snow doesn't stop these women from running in Somerset. They are, from left, Gina Isebrands, Kelly Binkowski, Sarah Mixdorf and Joyce Hagley.





Joyce Hayley, right, leads the group from left, Kelly Binkowski, Gina Isebrands and Sarah Mixdorf in stretching exercises at Ames Racquet and Fitness North.

themselves again. For women like Binkowski, who loves running, it can still be a challenge to fit it in when life gets messy or she's overscheduled.

"It's easier to get out of bed when you know someone is waiting for you," she says of early-morning runs.

"It's good to have someone to get up for," agrees seven-year runner Joyce Hagley. "Running serves as a common bond" among women who might not otherwise come together.

Talking and not talking are equally valuable. Hagley describes one cold early-morning run with a partner as symbolic: "We weren't even talking, just running and breathing in the same cold air." Through

## Want to know more?

For more reading on women who run, two reads worth page turning:

"Sole Sisters" by Jennifer Lin and Susan Warner  
 "Women Who Run" by Shanti Sosienksi

For more information on locating women runners, call the Ames Racquet & Fitness Center at 663-5099.

the quiet or the words, there is a shared experience that can't be rivaled with a chat over coffee.

Binkowski, Hagley and Gina Isebrands were each a part of the same marathon training group two years ago. Though over two decades separated older participants from younger, none seemed to notice. Running seems to bridge any age gap. There are life lessons shared on paths and trails.

Women runners often wonder how other people learn this stuff.

The marathon training of two years ago wasn't the first for Isebrands or Binkowski. Isebrands first did the Leukemia Society's Team in Training program in 1998. Being part of that group gave her training "a sense of purpose, something other than self," she shared.

Isebrands describes running with other women

as therapy. Sharing, venting, discussing goals, bouncing ideas off each other; it all happens easily when feet hit the pavement.

"Running, things spill out," Isebrands said.

Even when the long miles logged for a marathon become work, doing it with someone else makes it more bearable. There is some comfort in sharing the agony. The key to a good running relationship, Binkowski recommends, is finding someone you mesh with both personally and in speed.

And what about running with your father, boyfriend or spouse? Guys see it differently, according to Binkowski. They are there less to enjoy the moment, more to get it over with. Running with other women is just "a better dynamic for me," she said. It is a different frame of mind.

Women runners agree. Running transforms them. It changes life in many ways, all of them positive. So few other things can leave you both exhilarated and relaxed at once.



Debra Atkinson, senior lecturer in Health and Human Performance at Iowa State University and personal training director at Ames Racquet & Fitness Center, runs with an iPod when life is messy but will leave it home for group therapy.



## [PARENTING]

# Take the time to appreciate the blossoms



By LAURIE WINSLOW SARGENT

**O**n my wedding day, many moons ago, I received a beautiful crystal vase. It has since then resided primarily in my china cabinet, pulled out only for an occasional birthday rose. Recently, I realized that I've probably spent more time and energy over the years protecting it or cleaning it than I have enjoying it. "Kids!" I've cried out many times, "No cartwheels by the china cabinet! That vase might get broken!"

It wasn't until recently that I actually stopped to examine it closely. I was amazed to see patterns in the cut glass I had never noticed, although I'd owned the vase for over two decades!

So it can be with children. We know they are valuable. We want to spend time with them. We spend great effort attempting to protect them and even display them proudly on special occasions, for instance dressing them up for concerts, proms or family photos.

But as time goes by, we can be too busy to truly look at and listen carefully to our children, purposefully exploring the intricacies of their personalities. It helps to be reminded of our kid's positive traits, I think. And when we experience that appreciation, it can flow out into encouragement of our children. Can you find a few traits in the list, at right, that fit your child, and tell him or her in a Valentine how much you enjoy him or her and why?

## Attributes to appreciate from A to Z

- A** animated • adventurous • analytical • adaptable • artistic • affectionate
- B** bouncy • bold • balanced
- C** caring • cheerful • considerate • courageous • creative
- D** demonstrative • dramatic • decisive • diplomatic • determined • dreamer
- E** effervescent • efficient • entertaining • enthusiastic • extroverted
- F** faithful • funny • friendly • forgiving
- G** gracious • grateful • gregarious • go-getter
- H** honest • hospitable • humorous
- I** innocent • inspiring • independent • idealistic
- J** jaunty • joyful • just
- K** kind • knowing
- L** leader • lively • logical • loyal • listener
- M** merry • musical • mediator
- N** no-nonsense • nurturing • negotiator
- O** objective • optimistic • orderly • outspoken • obliging
- P** playful • persuasive • peaceful • patient
- Q** quick-witted • quality-oriented • questioning
- R** resourceful • rhythmic • reserved
- S** sociable • serious • spirited • spontaneous • self-reliant • self-sacrificing • spiritual
- T** take-charge • talkative • tenacious • tender • thoughtful • tolerant • thrill seeker
- U** unconventional • understanding • uninhibited • uplifting
- V** verbal • vocal • vigilant • virtuous • vivacious
- W** wiggly • winsome • wise • witty • wistful
- X** Xacting or Xuberant (yes, I know that's cheating!)
- Z** zany • zealous • zestful



© 2007 Laurie Winslow Sargent. Excerpted, in part, from the book "Delight in Your Child's Design" (2005, Tyndale/Focus on the Family). For information on this and other parenting resources, or to send a comment to Sargent, who resides in Ames, visit [www.ParentChildPlay.com](http://www.ParentChildPlay.com).



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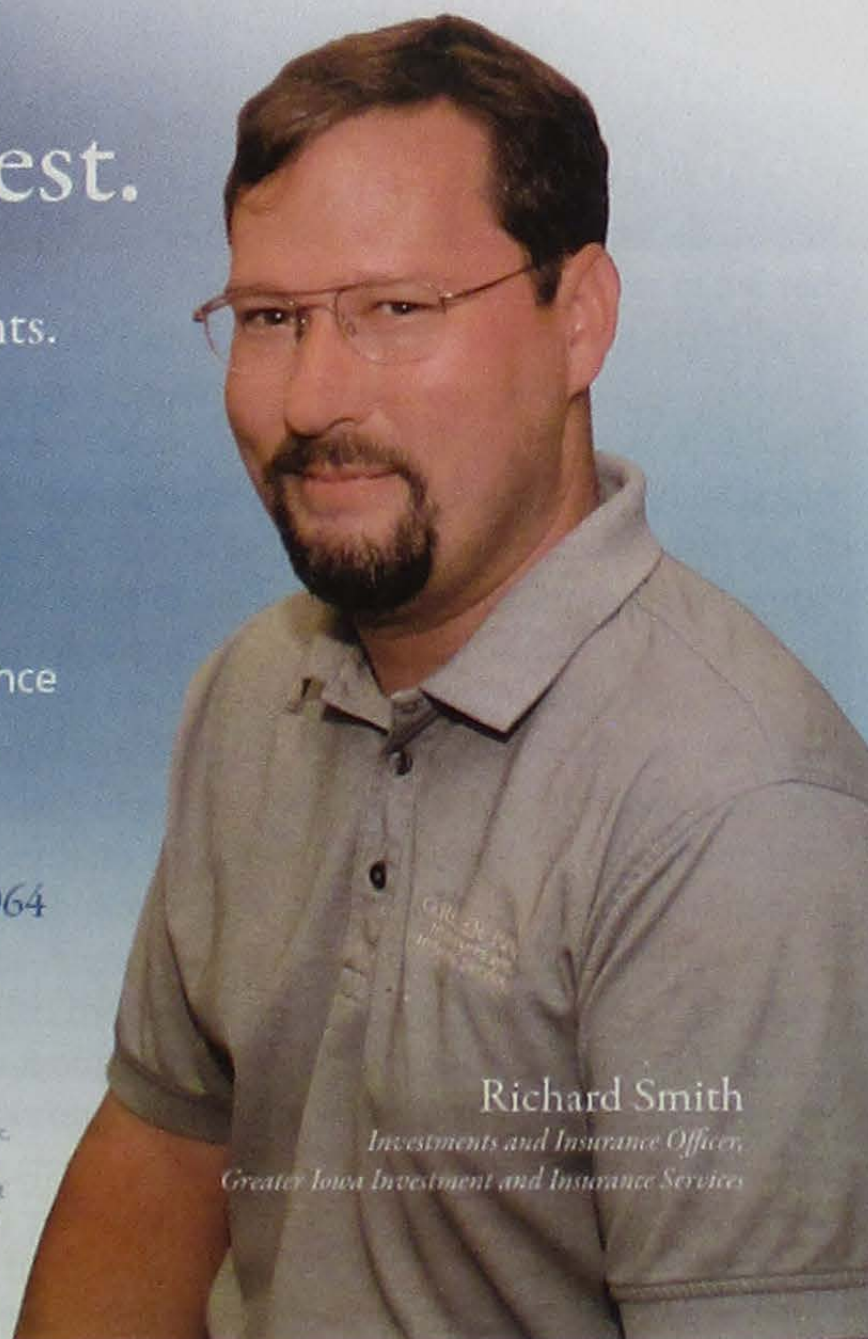
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## [ YOUR SAY ]

# sixty years of mixing things up

By NANCY LEWIS

**A**nne and I are 12 years old in this picture, which was taken in the fall of 1945. We had first met in the spring of 1943, shortly after my family moved to Springfield, Ohio, from Stanwood. We met at Northminster Presbyterian Church. Although we attended the same Sunday school class, sang in the Junior Choir together and both belonged to the Girl Scout troop that met at the church, at first we were just acquaintances.

But in the fall of 1944, something clicked between us, and we became best friends. That year we both asked for, and got, chemistry sets for Christmas, and after school either she would bring her set to my house, or I would take mine to her house. Neither of us was interested in following the directions that came with the sets; we both spent our time mixing up as many different combinations of chemicals as we could.

I found Anne's family exciting. Her mother could drive a car and was very active in the community. While her mother and grandparents were Presbyterian and attended church on Sunday, her father came from a Quaker family. Anne and her brothers were being allowed to choose which religion to follow, so they attended Quaker

Meeting sometimes. Their house had a large back yard, and part of it had been allowed to grow wild; when Anne and I weren't mixing chemicals, we often made up games to play in the wild area.

Anne has told me that she also found my family interesting because it was different from hers. We both learned a lot from spending so much time in each other's houses.

Anne's maternal grandparents lived nearby; in fact, I passed their house when walking to Anne's. On many Sunday afternoons Anne would spend time visiting her grandparents, listening to their record collection and learning about classical music. I didn't know what classical music was until Anne's mother and grandmother allowed Anne to invite

me to attend a symphony concert with them. I can still remember that the first piece on the program was Mendelssohn's "The Hebrides." I learned a lot that evening, including not to applaud between movements of a symphony. Classical music has given me a lot of pleasure over the years.

As we moved past our passion for chemistry, Anne was developing a talent for sketching. The Wittenberg College campus was next to Anne's house, and she wanted to sketch some of the buildings on the campus. I didn't have the talent or the patience for drawing, but I decided to attempt to make a map of the campus by pacing off the distances between buildings. I still have that map; I'm astonished at how nearly right it came out, considering that the

campus is situated on two high hills.

In April 1946, my family moved again, to Angola, Ind. Anne and I hated the separation. We got to see each other in June of that year, though, when my family brought me back so that I could join Northminster Church with our membership class. Anne had chosen to become a Presbyterian and was baptized at the same service. Anne's parents allowed her to visit me in Angola later that summer by taking a Greyhound bus, which seemed very daring.

By September 1947, we were back in Springfield and my father was teaching at Wittenberg. Anne and I were still friends, though without the "best friend" intensity of our earlier relationship. We both elected French as our





foreign language and we both took an interest in science. College days found me at Wittenberg and Anne at Mt. Holyoke, her mother's college. We would get together several times each summer to catch up and also visit with each other's mothers from time to time. I chose to become a medical technologist (chemistry again!), and Anne majored in French.

When I was married, Anne was living in Paris. She sent us a French newspaper as a wedding gift, which proved helpful to my husband when he had to take an exam in French as one of his doctoral requirements.

When Anne was married, she asked me to be her matron of honor, and I was delighted. I spent a wonderful weekend with her family

and her new in-laws.

Since then, we have only been able to meet infrequently, but we always send each other birthday and Christmas cards and often write during the year as well. And we are making increased use of the opportunity to e-mail messages and amusing texts to each other. I have a picture of her daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren on my buffet just now. I send her copies of my Facets articles.

We've both been blessed. Our friendship has lasted over 60 years.



Nancy Lewis lives in Ames and can be reached at 233-2874 or nswlewis@hotmail.com.



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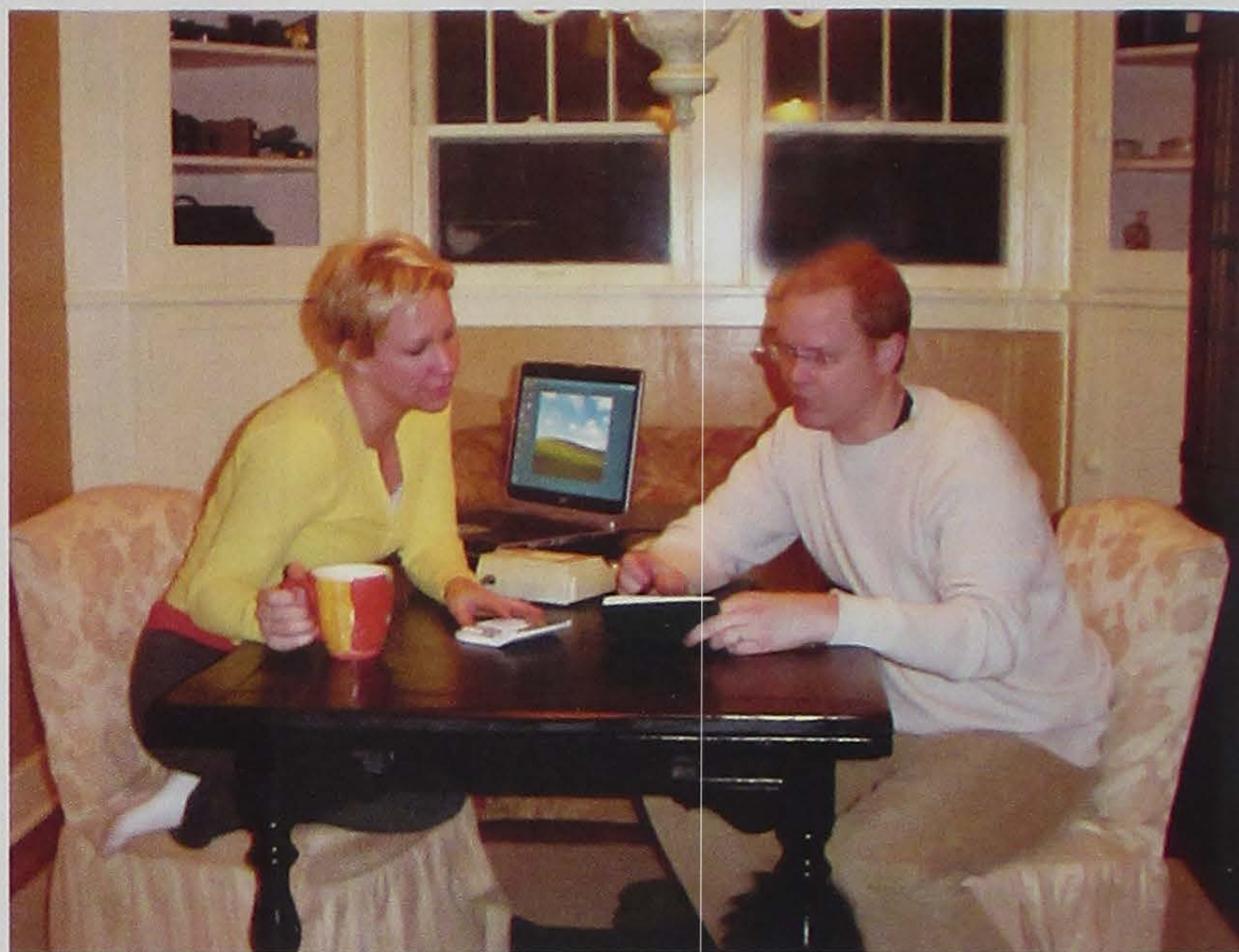
## [ FINANCE ]

# ... and they managed their money happily ever after

By KAREN PETERSEN

Do you and your partner love to talk about money? If not, you are not alone. In fact, statistics indicate money is the most common source of disagreement for couples.

There are ways to minimize money conflict:



By LOGAN HEMMEN

## It is not about money

This may be the most important topic in this column: Money is a vehicle to create the life you want. Money is not good or bad. Money does not make us happy or sad. Money is really an inanimate object. So conflict is not about money; it is about how we spend or save money and our expectations about money.

## Learn

You probably learned about money from your family. Some families save and purchase everything with cash; other families might have lots of toys and trips and credit card debt.

**Have a frank discussion about how your family dealt with money.** Talk about how you each think about money. Do you use money the same way as your family, or did you decide to be different than your family? This conversation will allow you to understand the reasons you might think about money differently.

I know of one couple that came from very different family money philosophies. She came from a family that had little when she was young. Her mother and father worked hard, planned together and improved their ability to earn and provide for their family.

His family also had very little. They really thought money was the root of all evil. They did not strive to have more; they were

satisfied to live a sparse life.

Neither philosophy was right or wrong. In fact each family was happy with their choice of lifestyle.

As fate would have it, these two opposites attracted. She worked hard to improve their life. He thought she was too focused on "getting ahead." She thought he was lazy and did not care to provide the good things for their family. Unfortunately, they did not come to understand each other's money experiences.

## Be a team

**Agree that you each have strengths and weaknesses.** I subscribe to the philosophy that what we focus on increases. Be sure to focus on the strengths each of you have.

One of you might be great at balancing the checkbook but unable to decipher the health insurance summary. One of you might not remember lunch money for the children but always remembers the dental appointments.

**Share the expenses.** If you both work, divide expenses proportionately to the income you each earn. If one earns \$25,000 and one earns \$45,000 divide the bills 36/64.

**Share big money decisions.** Determine an amount of money you will not spend without consulting with each other. This does



not mean that ultimately you will always agree, but it does mean that you will communicate about major purchases.

**Do not hide purchases.** I hear women say they buy clothes and shoes and then "hide" them for a while. When they wear them and are asked if it is new they honestly say, "This old thing? It's been in my closet for a long time."

### Leave room to be individuals

Each of you should have an amount of money that is yours to spend as you want — no questions asked and no need to share how you spend. You could spend it every month, or you could save for an important purchase.

### Communicate

One of the most effective ways to avoid money conflict is to talk about money.

**At the beginning of the year (February is close enough to the beginning) schedule the following money meetings:**

- One meeting to review your financial progress and set goals for the next 12 months.
- Two semi-annual investment and savings plan reviews.
- Four expense and debt payment reviews.

Before making major purchases, schedule uninterrupted time to focus on the cost and savings/spending impact of the purchase.

### Keys to success

**Make a change.** Our natural tendency is to resist change.

Decide on one financial change, determine the improvement you want, allocate a specific time to investigate options and set a deadline to implement your change. Your change could be a monthly "money meeting," it could be finding places to go out to eat that cost less than \$8 per meal, or it could be a plan of action to eliminate credit card debt. Working together to make a financial change is a great way to reduce stress that often comes with money discussions.

**Become more knowledgeable.** Decide to increase your knowledge about one financial topic. It might be investments, car insurance, your benefit program or college savings plans. You could read a book, attend a class, talk with friends or do Internet research.

**Know yourself.** One obstacle to success is the difficulty of deferring mild gratification for something better in the future. Sometimes just asking the question: "Do I want to spend my money this way or would I rather save for (fill in the blank)?" will help you reach important goals.

Hope some of these ideas help you communicate and manage your money. And as always, strive for progress, not perfection.



Karen Petersen is a certified financial planner representative and can be reached at karen@MyMoreThanMoney.net.

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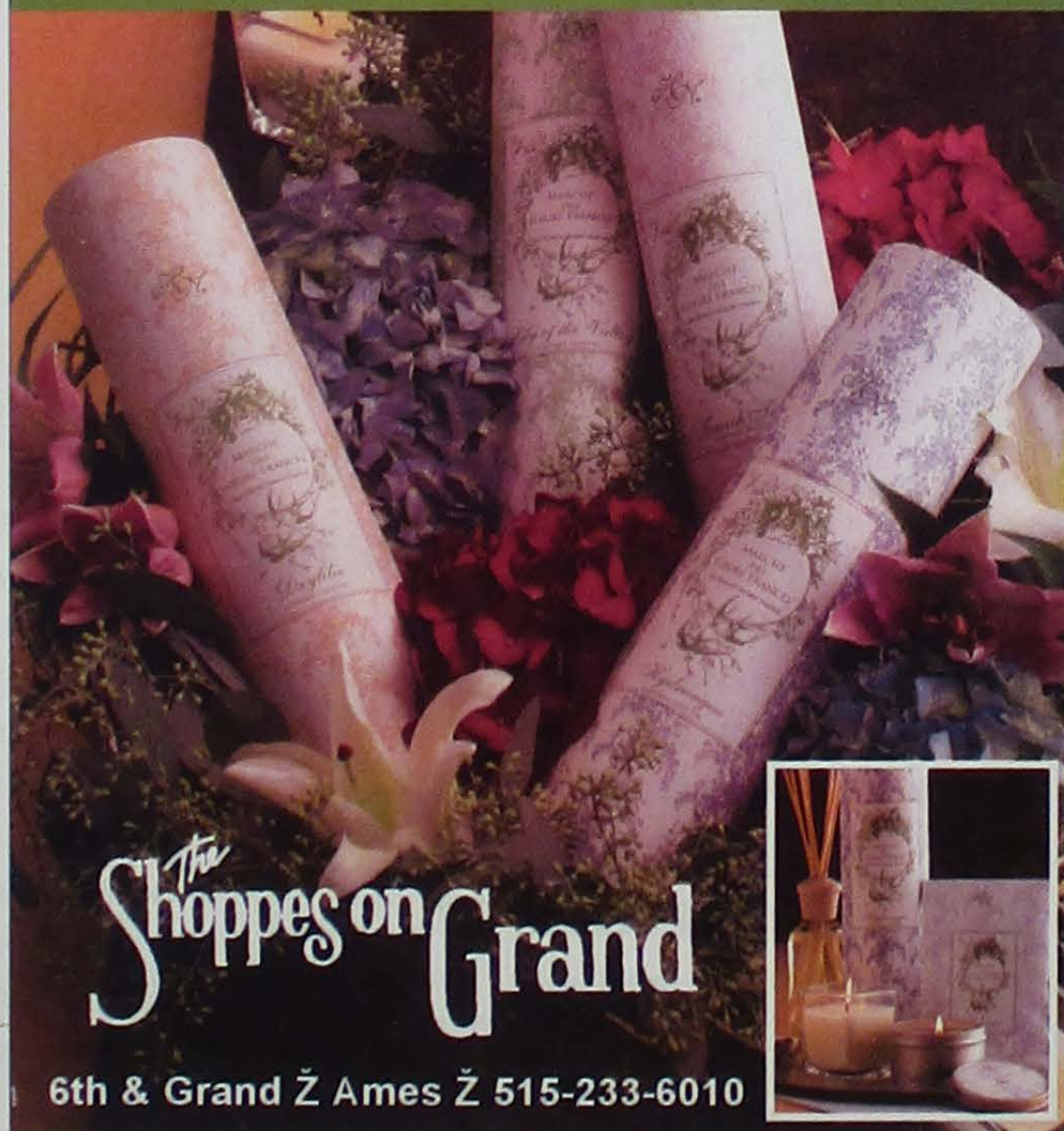
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# Twelve months to make you money smart

By KAREN PETERSEN

Last month you calculated how much money you choose to spend (discretionary dollars). Did you find you had fewer discretionary dollars than you would like?

The best way I know to increase discretionary dollars is to reduce debt: credit card payments, car loans, and second mortgage/home equity loans. All of these debts increase fixed expenses and reduce discretionary dollars.

## Determine how you spend your money.

Do you know how you spend your money? Do you want to know how much you spend on clothes, eating out, entertainment, Christmas gifts, books or your personal "love to buy" item? Many people say, "I have enough money. I do not need to itemize my spending."

I think a better question is: Can you buy/do everything you want? Can you:

- Take that trip you dream about?
- Send a child to camp?
- Work less?
- Buy a convertible?
- Spend a week at a spa?
- Set up an endowment?
- Retire early?
- Do whatever it is you dream of doing?

If you are not able to do the things you dream of, I think you want to know how you currently spend. This is not an exercise about right or wrong spending. It is an exercise for you to know how you spend so you can decide if you would like to make changes.

## February's Assignment: Determine how you spend your discretionary money.

Here is a quick and easy method to itemize spending:

Keep receipts for all purchases. Put an envelope in your purse to hold the receipts, circle the date and note the method of payment: cash, credit, debit or check.

Create several categories that represent your spending. Some of my personal categories are:

- Groceries
- Clothes
- Household items
- Hair/cosmetics
- Eat out/ Entertainment
- Gifts
- Gas

After 30 days, total your categories. Then summarize your results. How much did you spend in each category? Did your spending seem normal?

Here is an example of "normal:" If you re-decorated a bedroom, spent \$500 on bedding, and you typically spend that amount on decorating and updating your home each month, consider it normal. If not, determine an average monthly amount you spend on decorating.

Were you surprised at the amounts? Did you spend more totally than you thought? Did you spend more or less in a category than you expected?

Analyze the method of payment. What portion of your spending was allocated to each method? Do you always use a debit card for gas and pay for groceries with a check? Do you use credit cards more right before pay day? When you use a credit card, do you spend more than if you spent cash? My unscientific research says people spend nearly 20 percent more when using a credit card.

Write a quick summary of what you learn. Are there changes you would like to make?

Continue to track how you spend your money. Knowing how you spend allows you to make choices.

I would love to hear your experiences as you work on the smart money assignments.



*If becoming better money manager sounds like a good idea to you, but you find it hard to do alone, consider joining a group of other women. Call*

Karen Petersen at 232-2785 or e-mail [karen@MyMoreThanMoney.net](mailto:karen@MyMoreThanMoney.net).



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# The POWER of female friendships

**F**or generations, popular culture has provided icons of female friendship: Lucy and Ethel, Mary and Rhoda, The Golden Girls, the cosmopolitan divas from *Sex and the City*. Regardless of generation or medium, underlying each of these friendships is an element of support, a tremendous amount of verbal communication and a deep need for one another.

In an effort to better understand the role friends play in the lives of real women, Facets gathered 10 women together for a lively discussion. They were all eager to share stories about the friends who have walked with them through the triumphs and tragedies of life and the relationships that have proven to be absolutely vital to their happiness.

Here's who took part in this conversation on friendship

Pat Fox, Ames  
Liz Beck, Ames  
Sheryl Soden, Ames  
Beth Coon, Ames  
Carol Elbert, Ames  
Fran Frazier, Boone  
Sue Meenan, Ames  
Joanne Pfeiffer, Ames  
Lotus Miller, Ames

By SUSAN CANNY VERNON

## Defining friendship: The soul sister who just showed up

As they began to delve into the topic of friendship, it became apparent to our group members that friendships take many forms.

"There are friends you enjoy spending time with in a group, friends you participate in specific activities with, and then there are these one or two special women you have this unique bond with," Pat Fox said.

While they were quick to point out that all of their friends were important to them, it was their closest friends they felt most compelled to discuss.

"Those friends know you well enough they can say anything to you," Fran Frazier said. "Someone you can be yourself with who loves you no matter what and will always be there



Lotus Miller and Pat Fox

IMAGES BY NGAIRE/233-5447

to help you through the highs and lows, someone who will sing your praises even when they don't need to be sung."

"You don't have to put any make up on," Carol Elbert said. "You don't have to clean your house. You can just be

yourself, and they can see you at your worst and love you anyway."

"I can just drop in on her at any time and talk about absolutely anything," Lotus Miller said.

The ideas of trust and

acceptance were central as they attempted to define friendship, but there was something more that seemed defy explanation.

"There is an intangible bond you make with other women you just can't explain,"



Beth Coon said.

She related a story about a close friend. Though they speak on the phone only once or twice a year, their bond is at times uncanny.

"We can just pick up that conversation at any time, and it is like we were never apart," she marveled. "The morning my mother died, just by accident she called. No one even knew my mother was sick, and out of the blue, this friend just called."

"Like a soul sister who just showed up right when you needed her," Joanne Pfeiffer said.

The women agreed. They all understood some relationships transcend friendship.

### Friendship and well-being: We need female friends

In June 2001, the Harvard Medical School's Nurses' Health Study concluded that women's social networks play an important role in enhancing health and quality of life. The study went so far as to conclude that not having at least one good confidant is as detrimental to a woman's health as being overweight or a heavy smoker.

Carol Elbert felt this deeply when she moved to Germany as a young woman.

"I was so lonely I was ready to stop women on the street and ask them to be my friends," Elbert said. "I knew that was such an important part of my life I was really missing."

Fran Frazier shared a similar story about a move to Kansas City.

"I had no friends there," she said. "I missed that sense of cohesiveness desperately and didn't know how to achieve it."

Most of the women in the group had endured similar periods in their lives when moves or circumstances had disconnected them from other

women, and all of them spoke of those as darker times in their lives.

They agreed that having friends to talk with and share their problems with was essential to an overall feeling of well-being.

"When I am feeling grumpy," Frazier said, "one of

my friends will call and I feel better almost right away."

"There is a gentleness in these relationships and an acceptance," Fox said.

Liz Beck was more direct: "Women live longer. We need female friends!"



Beth Coon and Joanne Pfeiffer

IMAGES BY NGAIRE/233-5447





Liz Beck

### Coming to the rescue: Friendship in times of crisis

When Beck's best friend, Fran, moved away, she was 12 years old. The girls' fathers spent the next six years driving four hours once a month so their daughters could continue to be friends. More than 40 years later, Fran remains among the most important people in Beck's life.

She spoke with special affection about this woman she calls her "forever friend."

"When my husband died, my children and grandchildren were there and my brother was on his way, and I immediately turned and said, 'Call Fran,' and she came," Beck said. "I didn't need to explain anything to her. She was just there and knew what I needed, quietly behind the scenes, so quiet some people probably didn't even notice, but I knew she was there."

The story resonated with the group.

"When women have a crisis, they go to other women,"

Joanne Pfeiffer said. A registered nurse who teaches a class in relationships, Pfeiffer has read research on the subject. "Men fight or flee," she said, "but women talk to other women."

The rest of the group nodded in assent.

"I know a woman whose husband died, and one of her friends called her every day for a year just to see if she had made it through the night," Fran Frazier recalled.

For Liz Beck, the story is familiar. She has a friend who still calls her every two days just to hear her voice and discern from it how she is doing.

The need for help isn't purely emotional. Pat Fox shared a story about breaking a bone in her wrist last summer. She lives alone and relied on friends to come to her rescue. The first friend she found at home came right away, took her to the emergency room and tended to her needs.

The women tell stories of crises as small as a child going off to kindergarten and

as life-changing as divorce, a child's addiction, or the death of a spouse. They have shared their friends' struggles and celebrated with them when things have improved.

"When you go through a hard time with somebody, it connects you and strengthens that relationship," Fox said.

### Make friendship a priority

All of the women who met to discuss their friendships shared stories of relationships that had endured the test of time. They worked hard to make those friendships a priority in their lives. As a result, the friendships themselves became effortless.

"You don't have to think about anything," Fran Frazier said. "You don't have to tell your friends how to help you. They just know. They just know. I know how very lucky I am to have the friends I do."

*Susan Canny Vernon is a freelance writer who lives in Ames. She can be reached at [smvernon@mchsi.com](mailto:smvernon@mchsi.com).*

## The get-in-the-kitchen, quilting-bee approach to friendship

Historically, women gathered together to talk as their hands were busy making a quilt or fixing food for their families. That's not so true today, Liz Beck said.

"We don't have that natural 'get in the kitchen' approach to friendship anymore," she said.

Fran Frazier agreed. As a young mother, she was part of a bridge group comprised of other young moms.

"Times were slower then," she said. "You had time to nurture those relationships."

In today's world of two-income and single parent families and busy schedules, making time for friendship takes more planning and effort. The women in our group have developed some unique ways of making and finding time for friends over the years.

### Make an effort to know your children's friends' parents

Joanne Pfeiffer developed many of her friendships while watching her daughters at sporting events and activities.

"You see the same women game after game," she said. "Almost everything you go to do you have an opportunity to meet somebody." She noted that sometimes it was important for her to make the first overture of friendship.



### Learn a game or skill

Frazier and her friends formed a bridge club when their children were small and met regularly to chat and learn the game as their children played together. Through those initial games, a friendship was built that endures 30 years later. While mothers today might find a weekly bridge group difficult to maintain, gathering women together to pursue a common interest or learn a game or skill might just be worth the time spent.

### The birthday club

Sue Meenan finds it difficult to make time to see her busy friends regularly, so they have formed a club dubbed "Women Aging Gracefully." On a monthly basis they meet to celebrate the birthdays of their club members. Knowing that time is scheduled into her month makes it easier for her to manage when she can't find time for frequent visits with friends.



Sheryl Soden

### Combining friendships with family time

Carol Elbert and her friends all worked part-time outside the home when their children were small, but they managed to find time to forge friendships.

"I was very lucky to find to other women who had children the same ages as mine," Elbert said. "Three mornings a week our children played together at one mom's house while the other moms had some time to themselves. Through that playgroup I developed very close friendships with those women. We were so close I would have done almost anything for those women. One of them is still one of my closest friends 30 years later."

It was one of her playgroup friends who began a friendship tradition in Elbert's life that she has never abandoned: the dinner exchange. Once a week each woman's family would host the other family for dinner.

"It was very much a family dinner," she said — there was no house cleaning, no gourmet cooking, just two families joining for dinner and conversation. Thirty years later, their children have grown and their husbands have gone, but Carol and her friend still share dinner together once a week.



Fran Frazier

### The deli potluck

Liz Beck nurtures her friendships over food as well. As a single mom new to town, Beck could not cook but desperately wanted to entertain and make friends. The deli potluck was born. Twice a year, at least, Beck invites women to her home for a potluck dinner. Each woman she invites can bring a friend.

"The only rules are you have to buy whatever you bring," Beck said. "You can't make it. You can't doctor it. You can't transfer it to Tupperware, and you can't take it home with you when the party is over."

This stress-free potluck has allowed Beck to make new friends. It has also helped her to connect women in the community to one another, and she has enjoyed watching new friendships develop between her guests.

### Red hat clubs and girls' night out

Sheryl Soden has regular dates with her red hat club friends. The always noticeable ladies' group provides opportunities for women to connect, experience their communities and have fun.

The other women in the group participate in less formal girls' nights out with friends.



Sue Meenan





Pat Fox

### Nurture an interest

Several of the women in the group combine a personal passion with friendship. Pat Fox is an artist who relishes the time spent painting with her women-only art group. Several of the other women are avid readers who enjoy spending time together discussing literature. Still others get together with friends to exercise.

### Trips

Fran Frazier's bridge club friends live all over the Midwest today, but annually they reconnect on a week-long trip. They spend several days together at regional vacation spots relaxing, talking, shopping and enjoying each other's company. Frazier looks forward to the trip each year and marvels at their ability to always pick up where they left off and so easily maintain a decades-long friendship.

## A holistic approach to life

Joanne Pfeiffer has been studying the dynamics of friendship for 15 years in her position as a nursing instructor at Grandview College. Pfeiffer has created a unique course, "Nurturing Well-being," that aims to help students reach their potential in all aspects of their lives, including their personal relationships.

The idea for Nurturing Well-being was born from the turmoil in Pfeiffer's own life 15 years ago. After a painful divorce, she thought, "If we can help students understand the ingredients for a healthy relationship, what misery we can save them."

From this initial idea, she and colleagues developed a class including such diverse topics as energy systems, nutrition and exercise, humor, meditation and relationships.

"It is very much a holistic approach to life," she explained.

Invariably, the topic that generates the most discussion among her students is relationships.

"Semester after to semes-

ter, I hear the same things," she said. "Women are always asking me why men want to fix things when all they want them to do is listen. The men I have had in class tend to be more logical, while the women speak about every topic as it relates to their feelings and their life experiences."

For Pfeiffer, this underscores the importance of friends in a woman's life.

"Women just need someone to listen," she said.

Pfeiffer firmly believes the reasons go beyond emotion.

"There have been studies done," she said. "The male and female brain respond differently to stress."

The connection between



Beth Coon and Joanne Pfeiffer

the emotional and the physical is an important one to Pfeiffer. She cited the research of Dr. Dean Ornish, a renowned physician who proved healthy positive relationships had the power to reverse the effects of heart disease.

"He proved there is no other factor that has a greater impact on our well-being than intimacy, love and relationships," she said. "We need harmony and balance and right relationships in our lives."

Pfeiffer's students relish the opportunity to dialogue and share their life experiences and to learn from one another. Her course is part of Grandview's required curricu-

lum for nurses.

Inspired by the success of her Grandview College course, Pfeiffer is planning to offer a version of "Nurturing Well-being" to women in Ames beginning mid-March. Among other things, the course will consist of women getting to know one another, dialoguing and sharing on a variety of topics.

"We women must nurture all aspects of ourselves," she proclaimed.

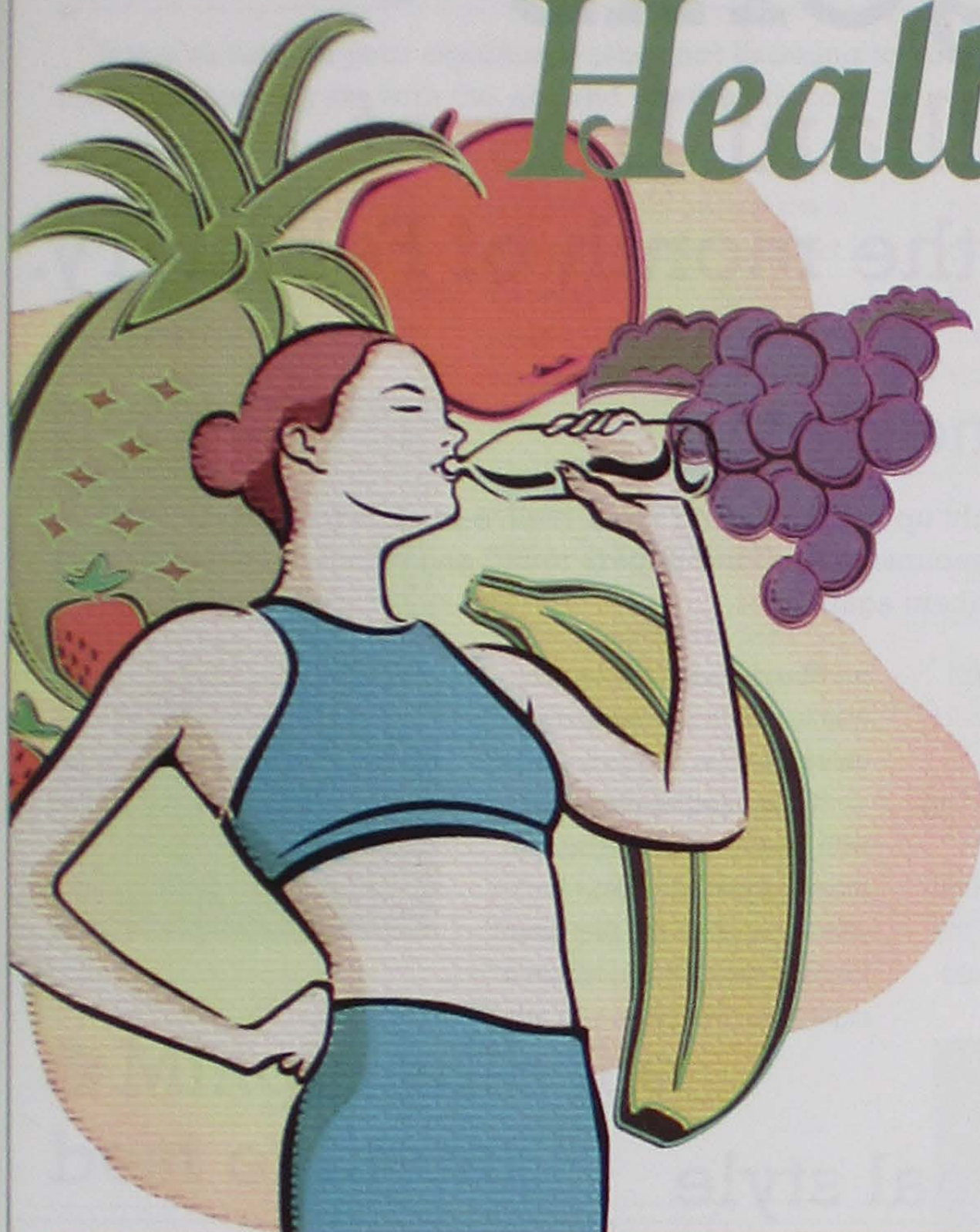
She invites all women seeking to "transcend limits, break barriers and harness energy" to contact her for registration at [jmphealth@aol.com](mailto:jmphealth@aol.com).

— Susan Canny Vernon



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# little gems

Take in some **brilliant bits of advice** for the month of February.



## One-time deal

It's easy to get caught up in "organizing" your mail, e-mail or paperwork — which sometimes amounts to shuffling papers round and round, only to have to come back to them again later.

Ginger Johnson, of Snap! Creative Works in Ames, said she used to think she was pretty good at efficient sorting, dealing and throwing. Then she heard about how a prominent public figure tackled the issue and realized she could get much better.

The person's philosophy was to only touch each item only once.

"Said another way, deal with whatever it is — mail, email, paperwork, etc. — when you get it the first time," Johnson said. "If you tackle it right then, well, then you are a

lot further than before.

"That little hint has helped me become more efficient and timely in matters of paper and computer work."

— Ginger Johnson can be reached at [tlpc@mchsi.com](mailto:tlpc@mchsi.com).

## Finding your personal style

As a modern woman in today's society, you do not have to follow fashion trends or fads. In selecting clothing, the No. 1 most important person for you to please is yourself.

- Your clothes should be a reflection of you, who you are and who you want to be. Don't try to copy style from a magazine. If it feels right for you, then it is right. You do not have to worry about what this season's skirt length is; wear the length that is flattering on you.
- Go through your closet and try on different pieces. Contemplate how each item makes you feel. If it makes you feel good and helps you

create your own style, keep it and enjoy wearing it. If you don't feel fabulous in it, get rid of it. If it doesn't fit correctly you will not be comfortable in it, and you will be easily distracted when wearing it. You want to wear clothing that is in tune with your personal style so that when you wear it you can forget about what you are wearing and enjoy your day.

- Take a couple of your favorite things from your

closet with you on your next shopping trip. Buy something new to go with an old favorite. This way you will update your wardrobe and expand it around the things that you know you like to wear. You also will be less likely to buy something too trendy for you that will end up hanging in your closet.

Allyson Walter is owner of The Savvy Shopper in Ames and can be reached at [Allyson@thesavvyshopperinc.com](mailto:Allyson@thesavvyshopperinc.com).





## Hearing those sweet nothings

If you're tired of your significant other not listening to you, consider this before you throw the lout out: The problem may be with the ear and not the attitude.

While it's true that hearing loss is more prevalent as people get older (three in 10 over age 60 have hearing loss), it



can also affect people much younger: Nearly 15 percent of those ages 41 to 59 have a hearing problem, and 7 percent of those age 29 to 40 already have hearing loss.

Hearing loss can have a significant effect on relationships. People with hearing loss can:

- Feel stressed out from straining to hear what others are saying.
- Feel annoyed at other people because they can't hear or understand them.
- Feel embarrassed to meet new people or from

misunderstanding what others are saying.

- Feel nervous about trying to hear and understand.
- Withdraw from social situations that they once enjoyed because of difficulty hearing.

On the other hand, hearing loss treatment can improve:

- Earning power.
- Communication in relationships.
- Intimacy and warmth in family relationships.
- Ease in communication.
- Emotional stability.

- Sense of control over life events.
- Perception of mental functioning.
- Physical health.
- Group social participation.

If you want to get you or your loved one's hearing checked, look in the yellow pages under "audiologist" or "physicians: ear, nose and throat."

—from the *Better Hearing Institute*:

[www.betterhearing.org](http://www.betterhearing.org)

## Mingle with the best of them

Here's the situation: You're at a business conference out of town. You know you should try to meet some new people at the event, but how do you start?

Business etiquette coach Barbara Pachter offers these tips for mingling:

1. **Practice.** Attend events where you must socialize regularly.
2. **Be positive.** Tell yourself "This will be fun; I'll meet great new people."
3. **Watch your body language.** Make sure your body expresses a relaxed, open attitude, and people will respond accordingly.
4. **Introduce yourself.** It's generally easiest to approach someone else who is alone; just say hello, introduce yourself and shake hands.
5. **Join groups of three or more.** Just approach the group, listen for a while, and when appropriate, join in. Add a casual "I'm Sue Jones, by the way" to introduce yourself.
6. **Vary your conversation.**



The weather is always a good ice-breaker; a comment about the event or travel to it works, too.

7. **Ask questions.** Questions are a great way to encourage someone to talk.
8. **Exit the conversation graciously.** If someone else has been talking, respond with something that shows you have been listening,

then use an exit line such as "It was great meeting you!" or "Excuse me. I need to grab Christopher before he leaves."

—These tips and more on business etiquette can be found in Pachter's book "New Rules @ Work," available at Ames Public Library.



# food & friendship:

## a delectable duo

by JOLENE PHILO

**F**ebruary can be a dreary month, with its cold days and long nights. But since it's also International Friendship Month, you can shake off your winter doldrums and brighten someone else's day with the gift of food: as a housewarming gift for the family that just moved in across the street, as a treat delivered to new parents or as a thank-you to the neighbor who shoveled your sidewalk.

If this idea appeals to you, but you don't have much time to bake, try the recipe below. It requires only a few basic ingredients and is easy to prepare. You can double or triple the recipe when you're in the cooking mood. Serve one cake as dessert for your family and deliver one to a friend. Wrap the extras in foil and put them in the freezer, ready to pull out and give to friends when the occasion arises.

A word of advice: Once you start giving food as gifts, keep your recipes beside your telephone because someone will call and ask for them. When that call comes, take a few minutes to chat and grow a friendship. Let your time together warm both your hearts and chase away those winter blues.



This cake can also be baked in an 8 to 9 inch round or square aluminum pan or, as shown in the photo, in a heart-shaped one. Line the aluminum pan with foil, as directed, but increase the baking time by 5 to 10 minutes.

By JOLENE PHILO

### gooey almond cake

*Don't get out your electric mixer for this recipe. A small mixing bowl and a sturdy spoon are all you need to put this cake together.*

3/4 cup butter, softened, or salad oil  
1 1/2 cups sugar  
2 eggs  
1/2 teaspoon vanilla  
2 teaspoons almond extract  
pinch of salt  
1 1/2 cups flour  
2 tablespoons sliced almonds  
2 teaspoons sugar

Stir 1 1/2 cups of sugar into softened butter or salad oil. Add the eggs, one at a time. Beat well. Add vanilla, almond extract and salt; beat well again. Stir in flour. Line an 8 to 10 inch iron skillet with foil and pour batter onto foil. Spread it evenly in pan. Sprinkle top with 2 teaspoons of sugar and the sliced almonds. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 to 35 minutes. Set skillet on rack to cool.

When the cake has cooled completely, invert a plate on top of the skillet and flip the plate and skillet over so the plate is on the bottom and the skillet is on top. Remove the skillet. Peel away the foil. Turn the cake back onto another plate to serve.



Jolene Philo is a freelance writer who lives in Boone. She can be reached at [philo@copper.net](mailto:philo@copper.net).



## [BOOK NOTES]

# Looking for love in the bookstore

By MARISA MYHRE

Welcome to the second annual Valentine's Day book review in which I dive into books on love—particularly how to find it and keep it.

One of the books I featured last year was "Love Smart: Find the One You Want—Fix the One you Got" by Phil McGraw (a.k.a. Dr. Phil). This year it has been released in paperback. I'm still very fond of this book; anyone who passed on the hardcover price last year may consider picking it up this year.

This year, I went for two old standbys. They aren't the newest or most popular books, but they are time-tested, and people who have read them enjoy them enough to send to to their friends after them and refuse to part with their own copies.

They both happen to be shelved in the Christian section.

## "When God Writes Your Love Story"

By ERIC AND LESLIE LUDY



**T**his book is written by a married couple who put the suggested plan to work for themselves and found a happy relationship together.

They both assert that there is no formula to finding love. The secret is trusting that God has someone picked out for you and will guide you to that person. But, as Leslie says, "just please don't make me wait until I'm 32!"

The opening is, in my opinion, a little over the top. Maybe a lot over the top. It reads like the most melodramatic romance novel ever written. Fortunately, the rest of the book is not so bad.

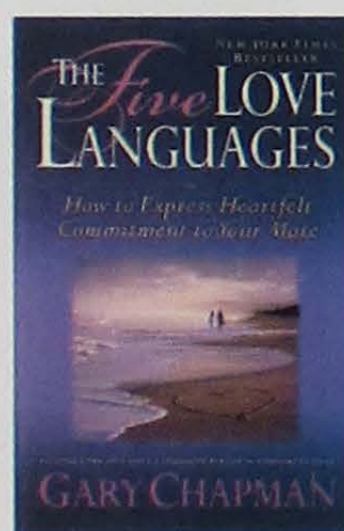
As promised, it is not a list of rules for dating. In fact, Leslie mentions how uncertain she felt under the rules she felt her religion gave her. She says the two things she believed the church expected was that she not have sex and that her partner must share her belief. Instead, she says, one must simply trust God to find one's future mate.

The couple also suggests thinking of the person they're destined for and loving them. Eric spoke of thinking of the woman God had chosen for him, wondering what she was doing that night and being jealous. He also gifted Leslie, on their honeymoon, with a set of love letters he had written before he even knew her. It's hard to avoid melting at the thought of that.

This is a book for anyone who believes they're too old for love, or anyone who's sick of cheap romance. Anyone looking for love and having trouble holding faith that it will happen can benefit from this book.

## "The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate"

By GARY CHAPMAN



**T**his book is tailored for couples who have been together long enough for the magic to cool.

Chapman, a popular Christian writer, has put out many books on relationships, and this book, detailing the five ways people will feel most loved, is his most popular.

The butterflies of love always fade, Chapman writes, and the trick to keeping your spouse happy is to find what makes

them feel most loved and make the effort to spread that feeling. He says that love is a choice a person makes to want to please his or her spouse.

Chapman says there are five "love languages:" words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service and physical touch. The behavior that makes a person feel most loved is his or her love language.

There is a chapter on each love language with examples from Chapman's 30 years of marriage counseling to show the way the languages work. He also gives a list of behaviors that would benefit a spouse with that love language as well as suggestions on how to keep track of how well you are doing meeting your spouse's needs.

The book also contains a chapter on how to treat children using their love language. While the book often refers to spouses, the suggestions could be followed for anyone close enough to you to identify their love language. In all, love languages seem to be a good way to use human nature to make others happy.



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# Facets Faces

## Ames Woman's Club

A general meeting of Ames Woman's Club is at 1:30 the second Monday of the month at 106 S. Dakota Ave., Ames. For information on joining, call 233-2884.





# hue & cry

Definition: *Any loud clamor or protest intended to incite others to action.*

## Dear Sofia of 2019,

This is your mother writing you from 2007. As I think of you now, just learning how to take a few steps without hanging onto my hand, it's hard to imagine that at some point we are going to have this conversation. On the other hand, I've been told by moms who know that the years between toddler and teenager go by in a blink. And I think there's some worth in putting my thoughts on the topic on paper now, before your hormone levels, and hence, my mother-hen instincts, go into overdrive.

I want to tell you what I think about sex.

I should hope your dad and I have told you about the facts of life by now, so we'll skip the birds and the bees part. What I want to talk about is how all that applies to you and your relationships.

I'm writing this partly because there's an effort right now to make sex education in schools teach "abstinence only" until marriage, and leave out a lot of vital information. I think this is foolish.

Abstinence-only proponents want to give young people the same message about sex that they give about drugs: Just Say No! This approach makes some sense for drugs. Drugs are addicting and can really screw up your life, and the safest approach is to stay away from them completely. (On the other hand, Sofi, you probably already know that some drugs are worse than others. I don't want you to think that a glass of wine with dinner is in the same category as a shot of heroin. The risks involved with the two are very different — but I'll talk about risks later.) This approach doesn't make as much

sense for sex, which someday should be a normal, enriching part of your life. At some point (hopefully, still far into the future!) you are going to have sex, and you are going to have many decisions to make before that happens, even if that time doesn't come until after you are married. So, since the schools might be giving you a different message, here's what I think.

I'll start with one of the best messages I was given about sex when I was young, which I received in my Lutheran confirmation class: Sex is a gift from God. I must say, before my pastor started speaking, I thought we were going to get a much different message from him. We confirmands all giggled as he told us this, but the message stuck with me.

This means several things. First, sex is not to be feared. Sex, in and of itself, is not dirty. It's natural, and it's OK to want to have it and to enjoy it.

But this also means "casual sex" is an abuse of God's gift. Sex is more than a way to procreate, or a way to release raging hormones, though it can be both of these. It is designed as a way to bring two people closer together emotionally, even spiritually, and not just physically.

It's a pretty powerful thing.

This is true for both men and women, but from my experience, the emotional connection is especially true for women. Women invest a lot of themselves in a relationship when they have sex, which means sex can really deepen their relationships; on the other hand, if a sexual relationship falls apart, there are that many more

broken heartstrings to try to heal.

One way to think about sex is in terms of risks and rewards. In many ways, sex can be a very good thing, as I mentioned, but there are also many risks involved.

For teenage girls, pregnancy is a risk. Later in life, pregnancy most often becomes a reward, but pregnancy too early makes the rest of your life much more difficult. Some of the best parts of young adulthood — getting an education, moving to a new place, traveling, trying new things, socializing, even just sitting out on a porch swing trying to figure out what life is all about — become nearly impossible when you have another life to be responsible for.

There are health risks to sex, too. I'm sure you've learned all about HIV and AIDS by now — and here's hoping there's a cure by now, too. But as of 2007, there is not, despite the fact that some people don't seem to think AIDS is such a big deal anymore. The drugs that are available to fight AIDS can extend lives, but most often the drugs eventually cause such awful side effects that patients stop taking them. The risk of AIDS should not be taken lightly. And there are other sexually transmitted diseases that are much more common, and although most of them wouldn't kill you, they can cause problems in your health and in your relationships that last for the rest of your life.

There are, of course, ways to reduce the risks of pregnancy and STDs. You probably have heard of most of them; if you want to know more about them, I'll tell you. (And unless you wait until you marry, then want to have as many chil-

dren as you are able for all your childbearing years — I don't recommend this! — at some point you will need to learn about birth control options, at the very least.)

But all those methods reduce, not eliminate, the risks. And nothing can eliminate the risk of heartbreak, not even abstinence (though the fact that you didn't have sex with an ex can be a comfort after a breakup).

So here is what I want to tell you: Until you have graduated from high school, sex is too risky. I know, all sorts of high school kids have sex. But they are taking a gamble with their lives. One mistake — and mistakes do happen, especially with novices — can slam all sorts of doors of opportunity for your future. The brief rewards don't outweigh the long-term risks.

But once you are out on your own, once you are farther on the path to the goals in your life — well, then, I'll let you do your own figuring. It can be an amazing gift for your future husband to save sex until your wedding night, but you might decide differently. That's your decision. Let me say that again: That's your decision, between you and *your* conscience alone. Don't let anybody else, not the love of your life, or your own hormones, make that decision for you.

Don't be afraid to ask me embarrassing questions if you need to. And, if you need it, I'm still around to hold your hand.

Love, Mom.



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